DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 506 RC 016 030

AUTHOR Contreras, Maximiliano
TITLE Mexicano, Mexican-American or Chicano?
PUB DATE Sep 84
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Images; Cultural Pluralism; *Cultural Traits; Definitions; Foreign Workers; Hispanic American Culture; *Labeling (of Persons); *Mexican Americans; Mexicans; Middle Class Culture; Sociocultural Patterns; Socioeconomic Background; Spanish Speaking; *Undocumented Immigrants
IDENTIFIERS *Chicanos

ABSTRACT

Although often considered to be homogeneous, the Hispanic community contains many culturally diverse groups. In the United States today, those of Mexican heritage--by far the largest subgroup within the Hispanic community--can be further classified as Mexicano (undocumented resident), Mexican American, or Chicano. This classification system affords greater understanding of diverse needs, lifestyles, and aspirations. The subgroups can be analyzed in the areas of socioeconomic status, educational background, religious preferences, family size, political orientation, place of residence, philosophical make-up, languages spoken, and period of time living in the United States. The Mexicanos are newcomers and economic refugees escaping the unemployment and underemployment found in Mexico. They typically settle in urban centers, where they find low paying and unskilled positions. They must learn the language and culture of a new country and live with the constant possibility of deportation. Those who call themselves Mexican Americans may trace their United States ancestry back one generation or many. They believe in the Melting Pot concept of society with cultural differences and languages merged. Those who call themselves Chicanos relate to American society as a culturally pluralistic mix. They are Americans from all walks of life, who see themselves as having an important cultural heritage. (JHZ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED277506

Mexicano, Mexican-American or Chicano?

Maximiliano Contreras

September 1984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Maximiliano Contreras

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RC016030

DEC 1986
RECEIVED
ERIC/CRESS

MEXICANO, MEXICAN-AMERICAN OR CHICANO ?

Few people in America today would confuse a Bostonian lawyer with a coal miner from Appalacia. Even though they may both be of Anglo-Saxon heritage, speak English, and have light complexions, their sociological differences set them apart. When it comes to the Hispanic community, an assumption is falsely made that this is a homogeneous group. Quite to the contrary, within the Hispanic community, there are culturally diverse individuals such as those of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Argentine, Peruvian heritage etc. Each of these groups can be further differentiated by social class, geographic origins, educational background, occupational status, and political orientation in the same manner as their Anglo counterparts.

In the United States today, those of Mexican heritage comprise by far the largest subgroup in the Hispanic community. In the 1960's, this group was referred to as the invisible minority . This is no longer the case. In the 80's, they are very visible. However, despite their visibility, they remain poorly understood. It is this lack of understanding which leads to stereotyping. In fact, there is great diversity within this group. We can view those of Mexican descent who currently reside in the United States from a three part classification system: Mexicano

(undocumented), Mexican-American and Chicano. This classification system affords a greater understanding of the diverse needs, lifestyles and aspirations of these people. These subgroups can be analysed in the areas of socioeconomic status, educational background, religious preferences, family size, political orientation, place of residence, philosophical make-up, languages spoken and period of time living in the United States.

Perhaps the easiest of these three groups to explain is the Mexicano or undocumented resident. The Mexicano as a new arrival is indeed a foreigner in this country- just as a Chicano from Texas is a foreigner in Mexico or a German-American born in Wisconsin is a foreigner in Germany. It can be said that the Mexicano is an economic refugee escaping the unemployment and underemployment found in Mexico. They are the underclass who seek a better opportunity "al norte". [We are not speaking here of the middle or upper class Mexicans, for their lifestyles are not that different from their counterparts in the United States.] These refugees generally settle in the urban centers upon arriving in the States. They typically find work in low paying and unskilled positions (busboy, maid, factory worker). Most employers find that the Mexicano is a hard worker who will put in long hours. Finding employees who are honest, loyal and dependable is valued in this day and age when these worker traits are often lacking. Most of the Mexicanos have had little opportunity for formal schooling. For many, their children will

be the first family members to attend school in the United States. The Mexicano experiences not only culture shock, but future shock and institutional shock as well. The strength of these people is truly amazing.

Many uninformed politicans and people tend to think that this group influences politics of the Southwest. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Mexicano fears that any exposure would be cause for deportation. Most wish simply to earn enough money to return to a better life in their native land. This does not always happen. Those who stay face many problems, including having to acculturate to life in the big city and learn a new language. If they stay long enough, they (and certainly their children) will integrate themselves into the American system and the American way of life. The pre-adolescent Mexicano, as well as children born in the United States of Mexicano parents, will assimilate more easily than their parents. It is this young generation that will undergo the greatest transformations and become the new Mexican-Americans or Chicanos.

Those who call themselves Mexican-Americans may be second generation Americans or trace their United States ancestry back to the 1500's. For this group, English is the primary and most frequently spoken language. They are believers of the Melting Pot concept and have little use for Spanish, except as a language to be learned in the educational setting. The Mexican-American can

be described as being "all American". This group has joined the ranks of the middle class, and as such view education as necessary for upward mobility. They do not generally embrace the values of bilingual-multicultural education. As for their political orientation, they typically vote (as do most middle-class Americans) according to special interest groups related to work, ownership or recreational activities. For all practical purposes, the Mexican-American is typical of any middle socioeconomic class American. In fact, many Mexican-Americans have no use for the hyphenated name and wish only to be referred to as Americans. They may know no more of the historical origins of Cinco de Mayo than their co- workers, knowing only that May 5 the local happy hour features extra festivities plus great margaritas. This, of course, is no different than Irish-Americans on St. Patrick's day. In this manner, the Mexican-American has joined into the melting pot version of American society.

Those who call themselves Chicanos relate to American society as a culturally pluralistic mix (a salad bowl) as opposed to a melting pot, where cultural differences and languages are merged in the interest of homogeneity. The term Chicano is one which seems to arouse the emotions of many. One way to explain the term Chicano is to draw a parallel with the term "Black" as used by American Blacks. When "Black" first came into popular usage, it was viewed with skeptism by many Americans, being associated with militarism and radicalism. But Blacks were basically making

a philosophical statement, saying that as a group they had a cultural heritage of which they could be proud. Today, it is commonly accepted that "Black" is not associated with radicalism, but rather with ethnic pride. Socioeconomic level is not a common denominator among those who call themselves Black; a person can be living in the ghetto or in the most expensive neighborhood and still be called Black.

In the same way that "Black" applies to some Americans of Afro heritage, so the term Chicano applies to certain persons of Mexican heritage. Chicanos view themselves as being American but with a distinct cultural heritage of which they are proud. They value their Spanish speaking heritage and are supporters of bilingual/multicultural education. Being Chicano represents a philosophical stance, one where cultural differences are valued. As regards the dimensions of religion, family unit, educational and occupational attainment one Chicano can be seen to vary greatly from another. Chicanos as a group can run the spectrum on the socioeconomic ladder, from lower to upper class. Many have achieved positions of prominence as university professors, legislators, judges, doctors etc. In summarizing, it can be said that Chicanos are Americans from all walks of life, who see themselves as having an important genealogical heritage.

Dr. Contreras is a professor of bilingual/multicultural education at California State University, Dominquez Hills and academic director of summer programs in Mexico for International Universities.